

## Claims

1. A method of selling groceries, comprising:
- receiving an online order from a customer for grocery products the customer desires to pick up at a given location;
  - electronically processing payment information for said order;
  - retrieving said grocery products from a storage area containing a plurality of such products and maintaining said retrieved grocery products in generally the same temperature conditions as said products were kept in the storage area to inhibit spoilage of said products;
  - detecting arrival of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location;
  - dynamically selecting one of a plurality of loading areas at said given location and directing said customer to said selected loading area; and
  - moving said grocery products to said selected loading area for customer pickup responsive to detection of said customer.
2. The method of Claim 1 wherein receiving said order comprises receiving an order at a Web server from a remote client machine operated by said customer.
3. The method of Claim 1 wherein said client machine comprises a wireless communications device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated.
4. The method of Claim 1 wherein detecting arrival of said customer comprises detecting an identification device located in a vehicle in which said customer is seated.
5. The method of Claim 4 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder.
6. The method of Claim 1 wherein directing said customer comprises displaying information identifying said selected loading area to said customer.

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7. The method of Claim 1 wherein moving said grocery products to said selected loading area comprises moving a container containing said products to said loading area.

5 8. The method of Claim 7 wherein moving said container comprises using an automated transfer mechanism for moving said container.

9. The method of Claim 1 wherein said payment information includes a credit card number of said customer.

10 10. The method of Claim 1 further comprising separating refrigerated products from room temperature stored products after retrieving said products.

11. The method of Claim 1 further comprising loading said products into a vehicle in which ~~said customer is seated.~~

15 12. A method of selling merchandize, comprising:

receiving an order from a customer for a product desired to be picked up by the customer at a given location;

20 readying said product for customer pickup at said given location after receipt of said order;

detecting presence of said customer a predetermined distance from said given location;

directing said customer to a loading station at said given location; and

25 moving said product to said loading station for customer pickup responsive to detecting the presence of the customer.

13. The method of Claim 12 wherein receiving said order comprises receiving an order at a Web server from a remote client machine operated by said customer.

30 14. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine communicates with said Web server

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through an Internet connection.

15. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a personal computer.

5 16. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a Web-linked screen phone.

17. The method of Claim 13 wherein said client machine is a communications device having a wireless link to the Internet.

10 18. The method of Claim 12 wherein said merchandize comprises groceries, and said given location comprises a warehouse.

15 19. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises retrieving said product from a plurality of products located in a general storage area and moving said product to an intermediate temporary storage area.

20. The method of Claim 19 wherein said intermediate storage area has substantially the same ambient temperature conditions as said general storage area to inhibit product spoilage.

20 21. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises placing said product in a container having an identification tag, and associating said tag to said order.

22. The method of Claim 12 wherein detecting presence of said customer comprises detecting an identification device associated with said customer.

25 23. The method of Claim 22 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder located in a vehicle driven by said customer.

30 24. The method of Claim 23 wherein detecting said identification device comprises receiving a radio frequency signal emitted by the transponder.

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25. The method of Claim 22 wherein detecting said device comprises subjecting said vehicle to infrared radiation and detecting a reflection of said radiation emitted from said device.

26. The method of Claim 12 wherein detecting presence of said customer comprises receiving an input from said customer indicating his or her presence.

27. The method of Claim 26 wherein receiving an input comprises receiving an input on a keypad identifying said customer.

28. The method of Claim 26 wherein receiving an input comprises using a machine reader to read a card associated with the customer having information identifying said customer magnetically stored therein.

29. The method of Claim 12 wherein directing said customer comprises displaying information identifying said loading station to said customer.

30. The method of Claim 12 wherein readying said product comprises placing said product in a container, and wherein moving said product to said loading station comprises moving said container containing said product to said loading station.

31. The method of Claim 30 wherein said container comprises:  
a container body including an interior space for holding the merchandize;  
a microprocessor-controlled electronic display mounted on the container body for displaying information relating to ordered merchandize;  
an input device for inputting the information to be displayed on said display; and  
an identification tag having a unique identifier on said body.

32. The method of Claim 30 wherein moving said container comprises using an automated transfer mechanism for moving said container.

33. The method of Claim 32 wherein said automated transfer mechanism includes a conveyor mechanism.

34. The method of Claim 30 further comprising detecting whether said customer is attempting to leave said given location with said container, and if so, alerting said customer to return said container.

35. The method of Claim 12 wherein said steps are automated.

36. The method of Claim 12 further comprising registering said customer prior to receiving said order.

37. The method of Claim 36/wherein registering said customer comprises receiving from said customer username and password information.

38. The method of Claim 36 wherein registering said customer includes receiving contact information from said customer.

39. The method of Claim 36 wherein registering said customer includes receiving buyer profile information from said customer.

40. The method of Claim 12 further comprising receiving payment information from said customer.

41. The method of Claim 40 wherein said payment information includes a credit card number of said customer.

42. The method of Claim 12 further comprising dynamically selecting a loading station from one of a plurality of loading stations prior to directing the customer to the loading station.

43. The method of Claim 42 wherein said loading station is selected based on availability.

5 44. The method of Claim 42 wherein said loading station is selected based on which one of said loading stations is available for use or which one is most underutilized.

45. The method of Claim 12 further comprising loading the product into a vehicle driven by the customer at the loading station.

10 46. The method of Claim 12 further comprising receiving from the customer information on approximately what time the customer wishes to pick up the product.

47. The method of Claim 46 further comprising charging the customer a fee based on when the customer wishes to pick up the ordered product.

15 48. The method of Claim 12 further comprising dynamically calculating a price for said product and indicating said price to said customer.

49. A system for selling groceries to customers, comprising:

20 a computer for receiving an order for grocery products from a customer;

a storage area containing different groceries including the grocery products ordered by the customer;

a plurality of loading stations at which groceries can be loaded into customer vehicles;

25 detection apparatus for detecting the arrival of the customer to pickup the ordered products; and

a transfer mechanism responsive to detection of the customer by the detection apparatus for moving the products from the storage area to a loading station at which the customer can pickup the product.

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50. The system of claim 49 wherein the computer comprises a Web server.

51. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area comprises a main storage area and a temporary intermediate storage area, said intermediate storage area being used for storing products retrieved from the main storage area and readied for customer pickup.

52. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area comprises an area for storing refrigerated goods, an area for storing frozen goods, and an area for storing goods at room temperature.

53. The system of claim 49 wherein said storage area is part of a multi-storied building and said different groceries are stored on various floors of said building.

54. The system of claim 49 further comprising means for dynamically assigning loading stations to arriving customers.

55. The system of claim 49 wherein said detection apparatus comprises a reader for reading data from an identification device associated with each customer.

56. The system of claim 55 wherein said identification device comprises a transponder.

57. The system of claim 55 wherein said identification device comprises an identification card and said apparatus comprises a card reader.

58. The system of claim 49 further comprising a plurality of detection stations, each including a detection apparatus.

59. The system of claim 49 wherein each loading station includes a detection apparatus.

60. The system of claim 49 wherein the transfer system comprises a container locating

mechanism for locating a container in which said product is stored and transporters leading from the storage area to the loading stations for transferring the container from the storage area to a loading station.

5 61. The system of claim 49 further comprising a plurality of containers for storing ordered products, wherein each container comprises:

a container body including an interior space for holding the merchandize;

a microprocessor-controlled electronic display mounted on the container body for displaying information relating to ordered merchandize;

10 an input device for inputting the information to be displayed on said display; and

an identification tag having a unique identifier on said body.

62. A method of using a computer to sell merchandize to a customer, comprising:

receiving an indication from a customer of an interest in purchasing a product;

15 dynamically calculating a price for said product based on at least one variable factor;

offering said product to said customer for purchase at said price; and

receiving a response from said customer accepting said offer.

20 63. The method of Claim 62 wherein said computer comprises a Web server.

64. The method of Claim 62 wherein offering said product comprises generating a Web page accessible by said customer, said Web page displaying said price.

25 65. The method of Claim 62 wherein said factor comprises availability of said product.

66. The method of Claim 62 wherein said factor comprises time remaining before a next shipment of said product arrives.

30 66. The method of Claim 62 wherein said factor comprises perishability of said product.



67. The method of Claim 62 wherein said product is perishable and said factor comprises time remaining prior to an expiration date indicated on said product.

5 68. The method of Claim 62 wherein said factor comprises available resources to handle sale of said product.

69. The method of Claim 68 wherein said available resources includes availability of personnel at a given time.

10 70. A Web-based method of selling products to customers, comprising:

(a) receiving an online order for a given product from a customer;

(b) determining whether the customer should be encouraged to purchase an alternate product;

15 (c) if so, informing the customer that such an alternate product can be purchased;

(d) receiving from the customer an order for either said given product or an alternate product;

(e) selling said product ordered in (d) to said customer.

20 71. The Web-based method of Claim 70 wherein (b) comprises determining whether the given product is in short supply.

25 72. The Web-based method of Claim 70 wherein (b) comprises determining whether an alternate product exists and whether the alternate product is in over supply.

73. The Web-based method of Claim 70 wherein (b) comprises determining whether an alternate product exists and whether a program exists to promote the alternate product.

30 74. The Web-based method of Claim 70 wherein (b) comprises determining whether an alternate product exists and has an expiration date sooner than that of the given product.

75. The Web-based method of Claim 70 wherein (c) comprises providing the customer with an incentive to purchase the alternate product.

5 76. The Web-based method of Claim 75 wherein said incentive comprises pricing the alternate product lower than the given product.

10 77. The Web-based method of Claim 75 wherein said incentive comprises providing the customer with frequent shopper points redeemable for products for selecting the alternate product.

15 78. The Web-based method of Claim 75 wherein the incentive comprises pricing the given product higher than the alternate product. *a*

20 79. A Web-based method of identifying to a customer a product meeting certain nutritional characteristics desired by the customer, comprising:  
(a) providing a database of nutritional characteristics for a plurality of products;  
(b) receiving from the customer an online request to identify products meeting certain specified nutritional characteristics;  
(c) searching the database for products meeting those characteristics;  
(d) identifying products found in (c) to the customer.

25 80. A plurality of containers for use in collecting ordered merchandize, each container comprising:

a container body including an interior space for holding the merchandize;  
a microprocessor-controlled display mounted on the container body for displaying information relating to the ordered merchandize;  
an input device for inputting the information to be displayed on said display; and  
an identification tag having a unique identifier on said container body.

81. The plurality of containers of Claim 80, wherein each container further comprises a compartment for holding breakable items.

82. The plurality of containers of Claim 81 wherein said compartment is padded.

83. The plurality of containers of Claim 81 wherein said compartment includes a fastener for inhibiting movement of breakable items therein relative to the container.

84. The plurality of containers of Claim 80 wherein said display identifies the ordered merchandise.

85. The plurality of containers of Claim 80 wherein said display identifies a customer associated with said ordered merchandise.

86. A method of generating a shopping list, comprising:  
determining from historical data whether a pattern exists for the purchase of a given item;  
determining based on the time elapsed since the last purchase by the customer whether a purchase of the given item would generally fall within said pattern;  
if so, generating a shopping list that includes said item.

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